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SUBJECT: JERUSALEM SPECIAL MEDIA REACTION (11/26): PA Rejects
Settlement Offer; Urges US to Intensify Efforts

Summary

1. Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu's announcement of a 10-month moratorium on settlement construction in the West Bank and the Palestinian rejection of it as a deceitful and manipulative move dominate the local media. (No immediate response to the proposal in Hamas media.) The failure of Hamas and GOI to reach an agreement on a prisoner exchange deal and Abbas' announcement that he will remain in office until the next elections are overshadowed by local reaction to the settlement freeze proposal.

Freeze Deceitful and Without Jerusalem Unacceptable

2. Independent daily Al-Ayyam headlines "Netanyahu announced a 10-month settlement freeze!!!!," reporting that Netanyahu's plan continues Israel's existing policy of supporting settlement construction in Jerusalem and construction in 3000 settlements units in the West Bank. Dailies highlight U.S. reaction to the news, quoting Secretary Clinton welcoming the GOI decision and noting that it "helps move forward toward resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict." Al-Quds headline reads "Clinton and Mitchell welcome the announcement and believe it will support the resumption of negotiations."

3. Nabil Abu Rudeina, Spokesperson for the PA Presidency, stated that the PA rejects the proposed moratorium because it excludes

Jerusalem, noting "Jerusalem is a red line for the Palestinian and Arabs and must not be touched." Abu Rudeina stressed that the resumption of negotiations must be based on the complete cessation of settlements in the West Bank including occupied Jerusalem.

¶4. In a press conference today from Ramallah, Yasser Abed Rabbou, Secretary General of the PLO, reiterated that the 10-month moratorium offers nothing new and instead is a manipulative attempt by the GOI to gain more time to impose "facts on the ground" that will ensure the separation of Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank. In comments to the press yesterday, Abed Rabbou said, "Netanyahu and the whole world know that any exclusion of Jerusalem will ruin any chances to start a real peace process." He added that Netanyahu's announcement indicates that "we have not moved a single step towards progress in the peace process."

¶5. Abed Rabbou stated that the PA will not engage in peace negotiations prior to a full cessation of settlement activity. He expressed willingness to continue working with the U.S. administration and Envoy Mitchell and commended Clinton's and Mitchell's statements recognizing that Israel's proposal will not stop settlement construction. He voiced appreciation for the U.S. rejection of any unilateral actions in Jerusalem and their insistence that the Palestinian state must be established on the 1967 borders. He said, "the US can do more in order to ensure a trusted and viable peace process that will end the Palestinian Israeli conflict" and that there is still a chance to achieve such a peace. He stated that the PA will continue to work with the Arab

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states and the United Nations to issue a resolution that recognizes the 1967 as the borders of the Palestinian state.

¶6. Al Quds quotes Secretary General of the National Palestinian Initiative "Al-Mubadara" Mustafa Barghouti saying that Netanyahu's announcement is a "deceiving and a misleading attempt that cannot be accepted." He added that the exclusion of Jerusalem proves that Netanyahu is intent on separating Jerusalem from the West Bank. Barghouti urged rejection of the proposal and accused Netanyahu of lying twice: First, when he claimed that he had dismantled checkpoints when 600 checkpoints continue to be operated by GOI throughout the West Bank; and second, when he stated that Israel was committed to ensuring religious freedom when the GOI does not permit 96% of Palestinians to travel freely to Jerusalem for religious rituals.

¶7. Saeb Erekat, the PLO Chief Negotiator, refuted the claim that Netanyahu's announcement was a true freeze in settlement expansion since the GOI plans to continue construction of 3000 units in the West bank and excludes Jerusalem. Erekat called on the U.S. administration and international community to force Israel to accept a full cessation of settlements and urged the United States not to be deceived by the Israeli announcement. Erekat rhetorically questioned how such an announcement could help the peace process since in his opinion it does not represent any new offer from the Israelis.

¶8. Maan reports that Mohammad Dahlan, member of Fatah's Central Committee, accused Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of pursuing a policy of deception. Dahlan said that 10-month was an erstwhile initiative, and could not be considered a "standstill" since it excludes East Jerusalem. He emphasized that ignoring Jerusalem jeopardizes the peace process and warned the U.S. administration not to support the proposal since, in his opinion, it does not represent a real commitment to stop settlement activity.

Abbas Will Stay Not Run; Prisoner Exchange Fails Again

¶9. Dailies report on President Abbas' statements yesterday from Chile that he will not run in upcoming elections but will remain in his position until the elections take place. Abbas stated that "...we have reached a point where we are unable to resume

negotiations because the Israelis plan to proceed with settlement activities."

¶10. Dailies highlight the failure of the prisoner exchange deal and Hamas Khalil Al-Hayat's accusations that Israel obstructed the deal.

Independent daily Al-Ayyam reports that exchange deal talks have been postponed until after Adha Eid. According to press coverage, the Israelis rejected Hamas' request to release Abdallah Barghouti and Ibrahim Hamed.

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¶11. Al-Quds runs an editorial entitled: "The Partial Settlement Freeze" which discusses Israel's proposal and the Palestinian rejection of it. The writer accuses Netanyahu of being a

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professional manipulator. "...Since he took office he [Netanyahu] has publically supported the two state solution but laid out extremely difficult pre-conditions which he knew the Palestinian would never accept, now he approves a freeze but excludes Jerusalem knowing the Palestinians would reject it. The writer opines, "It is not enough for Palestinians to reject the proposal...Palestinians must explain the reason for rejecting the proposal and must propose alternatives to it."

¶12. Talal Okal opines in Al-Ayyam independent daily under the title "Eid is back, nothing has changed" (11/26): "We have been hearing a lot about how close the prisoner exchange deal was, but we were of course disappointed. This is not the first time; we should have remembered not to be optimistic, so that we don't face similar disappointments from Israeli policies and fake promises".

RUBINSTEIN